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THE PROBLEM OF THE RETURNING SOLDIER

BY BARBARA SPOFFORD MORGAN

A NATURAL function of civilians in war time is to ease the adjustment to peace. Big as may be the shake-up to industry and daily habit when the nation undertakes war, it is done in the fervor of patriotism, and the people find consolation for their material sacrifices in the thought that at worst they are but temporary. When peace comes, and the old basis is re-established, there is the feeling of permanence in the order of things, and the emotional spur that speeded up the preparations for war soon resolves into the usual motives incident to profit and loss. Moreover, the portion of a nation's people which carried on the war has a right to feel that its work is done, and that it may look to the rest of the country to revive industry and restore economic balances.

The returning soldier and his job are the focus of this adjustment. It is to be anticipated that the first market to feel the shock of peace is the labor market. Into it will be poured some millions of men, many of whom are more physically fit than ever before, but some of whom, possibly one in a hundred, will become permanent charges on the community unless they are carefully examined and trained. Formerly the halo and the pension discharged a nation's debt to its fighters. Now we are regarding those fighters from an enlightened point of view, at once more humanitarian and more selfish. We realize that they have dropped their daily activities to do a certain piece of work, and we pay them the respect of believing that when it is done they will want to be integral units of the nation once more. On the other hand, we see that these men are ourselves; unless they prosper, we shall not recover. Just as in peace times the number of the unemployed is a measure of the nation's economic health, so

the speed and completeness with which the soldiers are re-absorbed will determine the effectiveness of rehabilitation.

It is a remarkable phase of human reaction to this war that all the Allied Governments have accepted this point of view as a principle: that the soldiers must be directed in their return to civilian life, and that the direction must proceed on two lines: the qualifications of the men and the conditions of industry.

In contemplating this huge plan, one is tempted to believe that hopes deferred to the millenium are about to be realized; to see labor flowing evenly in the multiple channels of industry; to picture the man suited to the job and the job to the man, so that not only the pay but the work itself holds him; to imagine the former "casuals" of labor turned into steady workmen, building homes and sending their children to school. Some of these hopes may come true if we envisage what we are about to undertake and build an organization worthy of its object.

Once committed to provision for the returning soldiers, the foundation should be centralized control of the complex functions to be performed.

The machinery of reconstruction will have four classes of men to deal with (not considering the few who return to positions kept open):

1. Able-bodied men without position or seeking a change.
2. Slightly wounded men able to work without special training.
3. Disabled men dependent on re-education for a livelihood.
4. Permanently disabled men incapable of training.

All four classes of men will be under military control until discharged: the first under their regular officers, the last three under the Surgeon General. Upon their discharge some will need further medical treatment, others will need intensive training to make them able for self-support, most will need an adjustment of their war risk insurance and the majority will need placement. Many men will call upon all of these functions, and it is safe to say that none of them can be exercised independently.

The tendency at present in this country is to charge separate bodies with the different functions of reconstruction, clothing each with authority. We have the Federal Board for Vocational Education, charged with the training and

placing of wounded soldiers, and the Bureau of War Risk Insurance to adjust the money difficulties. The placement agency is not yet determined, but if it follows the lines laid down, it will operate independently of the others. So far, then, our policy is non-centralized and our legislation provides for only one class of returning soldiers.

On these two points our action contradicts the experience of the senior belligerents. The growth of rehabilitation work in France shows the progress made in centralizing and in providing for all classes of soldiers. The huge task of reconstruction, which one Government after another is taking upon itself without question, is a development of the social service idea; and amid the intense activity in welfare work behind the lines in France was born the conception that war must leave no wastes. As towns are rebuilt and land re-cultivated, so must human wreckage be turned to good account and re-educated, refitted, re-established. Out of the occupational therapy in the hospitals—the bedside work that at first served a purely medical purpose—grew the re-education work which, begun by private agencies, gained in importance until, in March, 1916, the Government created the *Office National des mutilés et réformés de la Guerre*. This Office, at first a small affair directed to co-operate with allied bureaus in the Departments of War, Interior and Labor, was extended a year later to include the bureaus. It has now under its jurisdiction the office of centralization and investigation, the commission to regulate the establishment of re-education centers and the central office of employment. The *Office National* is composed of two representatives each of the Departments of Labor and the Interior, besides a committee on administration, one on re-education, and a welfare council. The separation is strict between the military *Service de Santé*, which has charge of both curative and educative functions, and the civilian *Office National* which unites all the agencies for return to the community. Different countries draw the line at different points between military and civil authority, but all agree in drawing it absolutely. France, as we have seen, meets the question of co-ordination by centralizing the civil agencies in a body large enough to deal with all classes of discharged soldiers.

England has from the beginning regarded rehabilitation as a question of labor distribution. The work has been centralized since August, 1917, under the minister of pensions

working through a Special Grants Committee of twelve. This committee in turn works through local welfare committees to whom great responsibility is given, and special trades committees which provide for training men in groups of five or less in individual workshops. The point of view is clearly put by the Minister of Pensions in his "Instructions for the Treatment and Training of Disabled Men" when, before considering the soldier himself, he declares that "Training shall not conflict with the interest of employers and employed in any trade" (section 23).

The English scheme, although it appears to emphasize training less than do the other countries, is noteworthy for its insistence on the centralization of all efforts under one head, and its grasp of the question as not alone one of wounded men but of economic equilibrium.

The development in Italy has been somewhat like that in France, the private work passing into the hands of an *Opera Nazionale per la protezione ed assistenza degli invalidi della guerra*. Two deputies and two senators, elected by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate; twelve members by royal decree representing the Departments of the Interior, War, Marine, Treasury, Industry, Commerce and Labor and the large private associations, constitute this *Opera Nazionale* which unites all agencies concerned with the human reconstruction.

It is obvious that up to now the returning soldier has been a wounded soldier, and that the preoccupation of the countries in the theatre of war has been to put back at the front all the men possible. Their organizations have been perfecting the work of re-educating and placing disabled men, while at the same time they have been expanding and consolidating their machinery to care for the rush of men when peace is declared.

Canada and Australia, having fewer wounded men to deal with, have set about preparing even more definitely for peace, and their plans confirm the principle of centralization and the need of providing for all classes of returning soldiers.

In the official Canadian publication called *Reconstruction* for April, 1918, appears the following:

By recent Government changes direct access to the Privy Council through one cabinet minister is afforded discharged Canadian soldiers in all matters pertaining to their interests. . . . This minister is known as the Minister of Soldiers Civil Re-establishment.

On the other hand, responsibility for the physical welfare of wounded and invalided men now rests continuously and unequivocally with the Canadian Army Medical Corps until the date of discharge. The decision as to when finality has been reached also lies with that body. This finality has two descriptions.

One—representing cure or complete healing. . . .

The other—representing a decision either that the case is incurable or that it will require prolonged treatment as in the case of tuberculosis.

In both instances, immediately upon his military discharge the man's welfare becomes a charge upon the new department of government created. . . .

The Department of Soldiers Civil Re-establishment will for the present carry on its work through two branches, both of which were already in existence and fully organized when the department was created.

As far back as 1915, the Secretary of the Military Hospitals Commission published a plan called "The Provision of Employment for Members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on their return to Canada and the Re-education of those who are unable to follow their previous Occupations because of Disability."

In this plan the secretary considers four classes of men similar to the ones described above and discusses procedures for dealing with each. It is such plans and others that have shown the impossibility of dealing with one section only of returning soldiers, and of handling the matter through a number of independent bodies, and have culminated in the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment. And yet, with all this admirable organization, the number of men sent out by Canada up to last May was 450,000, and the number sent back 42,000.

The Australian figures are in different proportion. With a total expeditionary force of 400,000 men, the number returned so far is 60,000. But Australia has passed through parallel stages and has now created a Department of Repatriation, with a cabinet minister at its head and a director at a salary of \$12,500. The great effort in Australia is a land scheme, to put all returning soldiers, wounded or otherwise, on the farms. The Government furnishes land, equipment, and capital to start with on very liberal terms. So large is this scheme that the appropriation for next year alone is three hundred millions of dollars. But the form of occupation is optional with the men, and the Department of Repatriation cares for them from the time they land until they are launched in self-support.

Were the United States planning the work of reconstruction afresh, she would find ideas to be assimilated in the plans of all countries. She would observe how each Government has progressed from several autonomous bodies to a centralized authoritative agency for rehabilitation. She would study the functional restoration in France, the labor programme in England, the organization of Canada, the land scheme of Australia. The result, could we create ideally, would be a Department or Administration of Return for the period of reconstruction only. This Department would be independent, headed by a man responsible to the President alone, with a departmental budget and representation in the cabinet. Its divisions would be the Bureau of War Risk Insurance—taken for the time out of the Treasury Department—the Federal Board for Vocational Education—or that part of it given over to reconstruction—the placement body, and others yet to be created. In a word, every official agency concerned with returning men after their discharge to civil life would be incorporated in this department, and the non-official agencies which are already springing up everywhere would look to the department for authorization. Of all human institutions, such a department would be the best guarantee to the soldiers of an orderly procedure from one stage to the next without duplication or conflicting authorities. Such an organization is not likely to be created in this country; it may grow through the pressure of need from disorganized beginnings. There are two forces which operate against its establishment by direct act. It is probable at this stage of war activity that the heads of highly important departments would not be willing to relinquish such of their bureaus as are the logical channels of reconstruction, to a new and independent arm of government; further, those bureaus which are now autonomous would find it difficult not to exert influence against their subordination to a new department. The second reason is that the legislation already enacted looks to co-operation rather than combination. These reasons are powerful in a democracy; they are human and have a certain base in expediency.

This legislation should now be considered in brief summary, and may give the key to a plan which will produce successful re-establishment.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Bill, passed by the House on June 10th, 1918, and since become law, provides in its

first section for the name of the Act. In the second section it specifies that the Federal Board for Vocational Education shall furnish such course of vocational rehabilitation as it shall prescribe to every person disabled under circumstances that entitle him after discharge to compensation under the War Risk Insurance Act, when in the opinion of the Board such a person is unable to pursue a gainful occupation. The remainder of the section provides for compensation during training equal to the last monthly pay or to the insurance, whichever is greater, and includes in this pay the family allotments. It directs that if a person who has once elected to take the course fails to follow it, the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, upon certification by the Federal Board, shall withhold payment. The military and naval family allowance and compensation appropriations are to be available for these payments. Section 3 provides that the courses shall be open to every person entitled to compensation, provided he forego the compensation. Section 4 gives to the Board the power to furnish facilities, instructors and courses, to prescribe the courses, to pay certain expenses, to provide for the placement of rehabilitated persons, and it directs the Board to use the facilities of the Department of Labor for placement purposes. Section 5 provides for studies in training and placement. Section 6 specifies that medical and surgical work prior to discharge shall be under the control of the War Department and Navy Department, and directs that a plan of pre-vocational training be established between these departments and the Board. It also directs the Board to cooperate with the War and Navy Departments to insure a continuous process of pre-vocational training. Section 7 authorizes the Board to receive gifts. Section 8 appropriates two million dollars, segregated for its use. Section 9 provides for the filing of accounts. Section 10 repeals section 304 of the War Risk Insurance Act.

This bill is the result of much controversy, which has centered on the treatment of wounded men. The Surgeon General's office, a composite board, and the Federal Board for Vocational Education, have been discussed as agencies and the last has captured the bill. The Federal Board was created in 1917 under the Smith-Hughes Act to study and promote vocational education. The Secretary of Agriculture is chairman, and its other members are the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, the Commissioner of Educa-

tion, and three non-official representatives of manufacture and commerce, of agriculture and of labor. No one of these men gives his full time to the Board, which works through an executive staff especially chosen for vocational education.

Neither of the prime requisites is met in this legislation. We are intending to distribute our soldiers as they are discharged from the army: In the bill we provide for a fraction of them. We have seen the principle of centralization, established so many times, confirmed in this undertaking by the experience of other nations: in this bill it is not only negated but discouraged. It should be observed particularly that while co-operation in respect of certain limited functions is made mandatory, yet the machinery is not provided for carrying it out.

In considering the details of the bill, these points are to be noted:

1. The selection of the men to be trained is optional with the Federal Board (section 2).

2. The Federal Board shall use the facilities of the Labor Department for placement and

3. Shall establish a plan with the War and Navy Departments for pre-vocational education. (sections 4 and 5).

4. The relation of the Board to the Bureau of War Risk Insurance shall be through the certification of payments. (section 2).

1. The optional selection of men "unable to pursue a gainful occupation" means that men whom training would make larger assets to the country either would not come under the Federal Board because they are not technically disabled, or under section 3 they could take the courses only by foregoing their insurance. Necessity will compel more comprehensive training provision than this; under the present bill a duplicate training agency would have to be established.

2. The far greater number of men will have no connection with the Federal Board and will be placed by some body not yet created. We shall then have two official placement agencies at work.

3. Establishing a plan for pre-vocational training with the War and Navy Departments means, in action, that the Federal Board or its subordinates will advise the doctors on the occupational therapy of their patients. The entrance of a civil body into military authority is contrary to the experience of all countries. The tendency has been to make the

separation more and more strict. In Canada, it is true, the vocational adviser and the doctor have gone hand in hand in the provinces. But this has been a matter of personal adjustment, and dependent upon it for success. It is unwise to attempt advice which cannot be backed up with authority; in this case no civilian body should attempt to interfere with the military; it should take the man upon his discharge and not before.

4. The Bureau of War Risk Insurance has a more complex function in this work of rehabilitation than is generally supposed. Some idea of its scope appears in this passage from the Act creating it.

If and while the disability is partial the monthly compensation shall be a percentage of the compensation that would be payable for his total disability, *equal to the degree of the reduction in earning capacity resulting from the disability*, but no compensation shall be payable for a reduction in earning capacity rated at less than 10%.

The italicized portion of this clause will give rise to a great many claims based on earnings before the war, promised raises in pay, and such matters. It will also work in the minds of some against taking the Federal Board's training, for although the bill provides for generous pay during the training, it does not affect the operation of this clause after the training period. To meet these issues effectively the Bureau would have to assemble a corps of investigators representing the farthest advance in social work and a point of view economic, sociological, humanitarian—but not philanthropic. These investigators would collect the great mass of personal data, including family background and present status, which will form the basis for individual decisions on the clause quoted. Such data would be equally important in many cases to the Federal Board for deciding training, and the investigation should be so directed as to be of equal value to both the Bureau and the Board. Unless the two are more closely co-ordinated than is provided in the bill, the Federal Board will have to establish its own corps, and the families of the soldiers will be investigated twice. It need hardly be said that no single point of reconstruction requires more delicate handling than this matter of investigating.

From the standpoint of organization, matters will not be improved when the placement agency is established. Some notion of the tentative efforts and the size of the task appear

in the April issue of *The Nation's Business*, the official publication of the United States Chamber of Commerce:

The State of Pennsylvania is a case in point. By means of a questionnaire sent broadcast throughout the State, the Bureau of Employment of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry has established the interesting fact that 42,111 men crippled or permanently disabled through war service may find, in that commonwealth, suitable employment. . . .

The questionnaire sent to employers by the Department of Labor and Industry designated 38 general classes of disability which might result from war wounds to handicap the soldier or sailor when he desires to engage in industrial work.

The largest number of positions open to disabled men are available to those who return with repulsive facial disfigurements, employers reporting that they have jobs for 5,783 such men. Next come those who have suffered only the loss of fingers on one hand. In this classification are 4,451 places, while there are places for 729 with fingers missing from both hands. There are three jobs for men with both hands amputated at the wrist and 458 with only one hand gone. Loss of one arm below the elbow, 374; loss of one arm at shoulder, 328. Men to the number of 2,321 with stiff finger joints on one hand, and 2,014 similarly afflicted as to both hands, will be able to find employment. Six hundred and four with stiff wrist joint, one arm, and 499, both arms, can be provided for.

Other classifications are—stiff elbow joint, one arm, 897, both arms, 72; stiff shoulder joint, one arm, 521, both arms, 80; partial loss of foot, 2,149, both feet, 599; loss of foot at ankle, one foot, 1,074, both feet, 401; loss of leg below knee, one leg, 993, both legs, 175; loss of leg at knee, one leg, 649, both legs, 73; loss of leg at middle of thigh, one leg, 491, both legs, 52; loss of leg at hip joint, one leg, 795, both legs, 48; stiffness of lower extremities, one leg, 432, both legs, 113; blindness in one eye, 4,021; deafness, one ear, 3,642, both ears, 501; loss of speech, 2,981; hernia, 909; general health impairment preventing heavy manual labor, 1,321; miscellaneous, 1,558.

If 42,111 crippled men can be absorbed (and apparently without training) in the State of Pennsylvania alone, the intensity of the demand for labor is evident. On the other hand, some of this willingness to employ cripples is based on patriotism and on inexperience, and may not stand up against increased liability insurance costs and possible falling off in profits. The placement agency will require business men as well as labor men to direct it; it will have to restrict as well as distribute; to place and to replace, as a natural post-bellum restlessness keeps the men moving.

For lack of a Department of Return—which, for the reasons previously mentioned, seems unlikely now—what is the remedy for the overlapping and cross-purpose that ap-

pear to threaten when the present bill begins to work? How shall we unite the several bodies that are mutually independent, but with functions that interlock, all charged with the civil return of the soldiers?

Co-ordination can be insured through the establishment of a body, commission in form and executive in fact. It would unite the several functions now operating separately and would realize the co-operation desired in the bill, but not articulated. On this commission would sit the heads of the different divisions that handle the men, War Risk Insurance, Vocational Education, the placement agency yet to be created, the director of physical aftercare, the head of the clearing-house, and any other branches to be established. The chairman of the commission would be appointed from outside of these divisions; he would preside at meetings, and execute the decisions of the commission as a whole. The director of each function would retain his full authority within his sphere and within his department; at the meetings of the commission, procedures would be determined where functions overlap. The appropriations for the several divisions also would be controlled by the bodies to whom they were made, and the funds of the commission limited to running the central organization. The commission would fix uniform procedure in different localities. The sub-heads of each division in the States would sit in commission similar to the central organization, and operate as junction stations for their men. The administration of these local boards is hardly second in importance to that of the central body. The men will be cured, trained, and placed as near as possible to their homes, and the best possible executive in Washington will not offset a loose local organization.

In other words, we need the bond which is always needed when different authorities are working with the same material. The analogy in our permanent institutions is the rapidly spreading idea of municipal government by commission wherein the heads of widely separated departments meet for decisions on expenditures and common policies. If such unity of source has been urgent in matters of money, it is imperative when the common material is men to whom multiple authorities will mean confusion, and delays in decision may mean distress. Several of these processes will happen simultaneously: a man may be having after-care for tuberculosis from one division, while the Federal Board is train-

ing him as a dairyman and the Bureau of War Risk Insurance is investigating his claim; or in the original sorting-out after discharge, he may have been referred for placement, when in fact he needed training. Individual instances are as numerous as the individuals. There must be a central office which keeps track of every man, not in any particular branch, but throughout his course of rehabilitation and to which he returns at the end of each period.

From another angle, also, co-ordination is essential. We are undertaking a vast work and preparing a great machinery. The placement agency alone will be the greatest socioeconomic task ever attempted. But withal, it is optional on the part of the men. We cannot force them to enter our reconstruction machine. We earnestly desire them, perceiving it to be for their good and for ours. But the only compulsion we can exert is that, once deciding to use the Government's benefits, they accept its conditions. It follows, therefore, that our machinery must succeed if it is to exist at all. If the first men who experience its workings meet conflicting authorities and planless orders, the word will go out that it is of no use; and the rest of the men will shun it.

No phase of reconstruction is so important now as the plan of the whole. Although we have begun by building a wing of the house, we must let it stand, for the moment, and dig our foundations. We have passed a bill, but vocational education is but a part of reconstruction; we are going to handle demobilization, but wounded men are only a fraction of those discharged. In a war of this size, peace will come upon us with the shock of an attack—our strategy must be ready.

BARBARA SPOFFORD MORGAN.